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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: EVO'S APPROVAL DROPS; EXPECT NEW INITIATIVES

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary
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¶1. (SBU) While celebrating his ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party's recent "victories" in the Congress and Constituent Assembly, President Evo Morales must also be concerned about his drop in popularity, recent discontent in his stronghold of El Alto, planned protests by his once loyal base of cooperativist miners, and the ever-present threat of civil disobedience and resistance by six of Bolivia's nine departments. Two November polls, taken before the November 23-25 violence in Sucre, show the President's approval at one of its lowest points since taking office. Civic groups in El Alto, a city where he routinely registers 90 percent approval, announced that they would take their own measures if the President did not appoint some of its people to his cabinet. Meanwhile some cooperativist miners have announced a state of emergency in response to the MAS' draft constitution stating it did not take their concerns into consideration. Morales called for dialogue with opposition prefects November 29, but was rejected by all them, each essentially arguing they did not trust the President's overture. Evo has in the past rebounded from dips in his approval ratings by announcing new grand political programs; with trouble on several fronts we can expect new initiatives in the near future or an effort to tout the upcoming gathering of Presidents Luiz Inacio "Lula" Da Silva and Michelle Bachelet as a great success. End Summary.

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Evo's Approval Dips
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¶2. (U) Two recent polls show that Evo's approval has fallen to one of its lowest points since taking office. A recent Ipsos Apoyo poll (conducted November 12-18) has the President's approval at 52 percent; an Equipos Mori poll (conducted November 9-13) registered a 54 percent approval. The President's lowest point was 50 percent (according to

Equipos Mori) in October 2006 following a miners' dispute in Huanuni which left 16 people dead.

13. (SBU) Comment: Both polls were taken before the November 23-25 violence in Sucre which claimed three lives and hundreds of injured. Usually following such events a President's popularity tends to drop several points, as was the case with Huanuni. On the other hand, the polls do not register the Constituent Assembly's approval of the MAS' constitution (in general terms) November 24, and its likely final approval in December. Morales supporters who had lost faith in his delivering a new constitution are now rejoicing and are clearly back in the Morales corner. The Equipos Mori poll shows that seniors, people 61-years old and over, were the demographic that registered the lowest level of approval. The President's new pension plan "Renta Dignidad" may draw more seniors to Evo, but, this group's size pales in comparison to the sub-senior population, meaning the new pension may not provide him much of a bump. However, if 40- and 50-year olds believe this pension will stay in effect until they reach retirement age, "Renta Dignidad" might actually serve to soften what should be a drop in the President's December approval ratings. End Comment.

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Agitated in El Alto
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14. (SBU) The El Alto Inter-Institutional Committee, which includes the powerful Confederation of Neighborhoods (FEJUVE), met on November 29 to demand that President Morales appoint three cabinet officials to government ministries which were previously occupied by El Alto residents, threatening to make their own "way" if their demands were not met. The meeting was sparked by Evo's decision to replace scandal-plagued Water Minister Abel Mamani with interim minister Walter Valda. Valda is from Chuquisaca, the department which has been demanding the restoration of legislative and executive branches to Sucre over the very strong protests of El Alto. Mamani, before joining Morales' administration in January 2006, fronted a popular campaign to reverse the privatization of El Alto's water company (Aguas de Illimani). Mamani faces influence peddling charges, but what appears to have led to his dismissal were a series of embarrassing photos of the married Water Minister with a half-naked woman who was not his wife.

15. (C) Comment: Evo is not likely to lose El Alto anytime soon, as he routinely registers a 90 percent approval rating. The President certainly knows he cannot afford to lose El Alto's support and is certainly listening to the complaints. We can future cabinet appointment(s) will include someone from this critical MAS stronghold. End Comment).

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Miners Miffed over MAS Magna Carta
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16. (SBU) Various cooperativist miner organizations have begun to protest the MAS' new draft constitution. Approximately five-hundred former Huanuni cooperativists, unemployed for almost a year since the nationalization of the Huanuni deposit, marched on Sucre to reject the draft constitution. There they expressed their "unconditional support to the city of Sucre for the legal process that was not respected by the government in the vote on the (draft) constitution" according to their president Profirio Mamani. In the draft constitution, indigenous groups would be granted rights to land that they have traditionally used and rights to a share in the profits from resources on their traditional land. Currently there are as many as 50 cases (depending on the source of the information) of indigenous or campesino groups taking over small mines by force, claiming an indigenous right to the land. (Comment: On November 7, the Bolivian government signed into law the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is being cited by indigenous groups as justifying their taking of the mines. In many ways, the draft constitution merely

restates what is already now Bolivian law. End comment.)
The threat of more indigenous "takings" of cooperative mines
has turned the cooperativists against the draft constitution
and, to some extent, against the MAS.

17. (SBU) There have been previous signs of discord between
the cooperativist mining sector and the MAS, particularly
when the MAS-led government has favored state-employed miners
against cooperativists. In July, the leader of cooperativist
miners in Oruro complained that President Morales
discriminates against them in favor of the campesinos: "The
cooperative miners are supporters of the state, more than the
campesinos and indigenous, yet disgracefully they want to run
the country . . . we are not against the indigenous, but we
cannot go backwards" The cooperativist miners are
considered a dangerous political enemy, partially due to
their tendency to protest with dynamite and massive marches.
During the last major protest by Huanuni cooperativist
miners, President Morales attacked them publicly, saying,
"Before, the miners fought for the Bolivian people and not
just for a sector, region, or municipality, and now they are
becoming a sector that damages the country."

Evo (Belatedly) Calls for Dialogue . . .

18. (SBU) Following a meeting with European Union
Ambassadors President Evo Morales publicly called on
opposition prefects and business leaders to meet with him to
open a dialogue. However, the President's appeal focused
more on regional development and investment issues and not
the opposition's main concerns which center on the ruling
Movement Toward Socialism's (MAS) recent unilateral actions
within the Constituent Assembly and Congress. Morales'
statement included, "We want a debate so that investments are
transparent. I want to ask that the prefects for their help
in promoting the law against corruption." (Note:
Presidential Spokesperson Alex Contreras later argued the
President was open to dialogue without conditions. End
Note). Rather than strike a conciliatory tone with the
prefects, Evo once again criticized the prefect's recent acts
of civil disobedience (general strikes and hunger strikes)
and argued the prefect's are hypocrites seeking to divide the
nation. The President stated, "We (the government) are
responsible for defending the unity of the country and
democracy, and not with double speak."

. . . And the Opposition Rejects the Call

19. (SBU) President Morales' oft repeated phrase "we are
from a culture of dialogue" did not ring true with the six
prefects of Beni, Cochabamba, Pando, Santa Cruz and Tarija.
Each argued in his own way that the President could no longer
be trusted, and that without confidence building measures
negotiation was impossible. Sucre and Chuquisaca civic
leaders also rejected the President's call for dialogue.
(Note: Chuquisaca Prefect David Sanchez remains in hiding
since the deadly violence in Sucre November 23-25. End
Note). The Prefect of Santa Cruz perhaps summarized the
opposition's response most succinctly stating, "The President
of the Republic should ask for forgiveness from the people of
Chuquisaca for the deaths (that occurred November 23-25); he
needs to put back in place all legal conditions in the
country, and realize that it is he who (attacked) all
Bolivians. Santa Cruz Provisional Autonomic Assembly
President (and PODEMOS deputy), Carlos Pablo Klinksy
announced on November 29 that the department's autonomy
statute (announced in July) would be sent for a public
referendum after December 14, the date that Constituent
Assembly is scheduled to finish. The Santa Cruz statute
would directly conflict with the MAS' constitution.

10. (SBU) Some opposition prefects (depending on the
situation in their departments) are still considering a trip
to Washington sometime during the week of December 3 with the

intention of meeting with the Organization of American (OAS).

They hope to motivate the international community into becoming involved and welcome an opportunity to brief U.S. officials at State.

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Comment
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¶11. (SBU) The President has shown a propensity to bounce-back from low approval ratings. In November 2006 he rebounded using new government programs (money for school aged children) and political theater (the signing of new hydrocarbons contracts and a new land reform law). The November 2007 conflicts and deaths will almost certainly push Evo's current poll numbers further down. Rising inflation and uncertainty over what "resistance measures" the opposition departments will actually carry-out also make it unlikely that Evo's approval rises in December.

¶12. (C) Evo is not one to leave anything to chance, we can expect some grand political gestures in the near future to restore some luster to his (slightly) tarnished image. He launched his first salvo on November 29 by announcing the government would expropriate (with compensation) 180 thousand hectares of land in the Chuquisacan Chaco for the long-exploited Guarani peoples. The move is a brilliant tactic as it takes land from presumably opposition landowners and "compensates" indigenous peoples in the Chuquisaca, the very department that was the center of the November 23-25 violence. Evo will undoubtedly also try to use the December 10-12 visits of Lula and Bachelet to project an air of normalcy and legitimacy as well as tout "important" new commitments in gas investments. End Comment.
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